

Open Letter on Damaging Industrial Activities within Marine Protected Areas

To: Astrid Schomaker, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

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As marine scientists and conservationists representing a wide range of specialties and disciplines, we are deeply and collectively concerned about intensive and harmful human activities taking place within marine protected areas (MPAs) around the world. Over the last decade, countries have achieved significant progress toward establishing MPAs to combat the biodiversity crisis affecting our ocean.

Yet, damaging industrial activities occurring within many MPAs threaten the benefits to people and nature that would result from preserving and restoring marine ecosystems and species. According to clear, well-established science and guidelines developed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), these harmful activities are inherently incompatible with conservation.¹

For example, most MPAs in European waters experience greater fishing intensity than the surrounding “unprotected” areas.² Specifically, researchers found nearly 60 percent of MPAs designated by European Union countries are commercially trawled, and with greater intensity compared to nonprotected areas.³ The research also found that the abundance of sensitive species, such as sharks and rays, decreased by nearly 70 percent in heavily trawled areas.

Such threats to MPAs are not limited to Europe – recent research examining 90 percent of the global ocean covered by MPAs revealed that highly destructive activities, including mining, industrial fishing, dredging, waste dumping, or bottom trawling, are permitted across a third of that total area.⁴ These include large MPAs designated by Australia, Brazil, France, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States, among others.

Another growing threat comes from the growing presence of open-net pen industrial aquaculture within MPAs in Chile. Currently, 30% of salmon farming concessions (416 out of 1,407) are within protected marine areas, including many national reserves and parks. And over 100 more applications seeking permission to operate industrial farms are still pending. Some of the well-documented impacts of salmon farming includes oxygen depletion, biodiversity loss, chemical pollution, and habitat destruction.^{5,6,7,8,9, 10}

Additionally, we raise concerns about the standards for sustainability certification that could further encourage large-scale salmon aquaculture farms within MPAs that negatively impact nature and coastal communities. At a minimum, such certifications should require that any aquaculture activities within MPAs are fully compatible with the core objectives of the protected areas and exclude high-intensity or industrial aquaculture.

Further, encouraging expansion of industrial activities within MPAs also diminishes the efforts to achieve the global goals set by the United Nations to *effectively conserve* at least 30% of the ocean through protected areas or other area-based conservation measures by 2030.

We urge the certification standard organizations to consider the well-documented science and public comments as they consider revisions to their standards for industrial aquaculture around the world.

We also alert decision-makers, governments, certification programs, aquaculture farm companies, and consumers to understand the urgency and rationale for the ambition of

greater conservation of marine ecosystems and need for mechanisms and markets that seek sustainable production.

Finally, we call on all leaders around the globe to end all industrial extractive and damaging activities within marine protected areas. Without the rich biodiversity of the sea, there will be no future generations to enjoy the ecosystem benefits that nature provides.

Sincerely,

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